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STATEMENT BY ROBERT S. McNAMARA, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON THE INTRODUCTION OF OFFENSIVE WEAPONS
BY THE SOVIET UNION INTO CUBA

30 JANUARY 1963

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE:

This is the story of the introduction of offensive weapons into Cuba by the Soviet Union, as viewed from the Department of Defense.

Up to the spring of 1962, the Soviet Union had supplied the Cuban Army with great quantities of conventional weapons and supplies, from pistols and rifles to heavy artillery and medium tanks. MIG-15, 17 and 19 aircraft and helicopters had been provided the Cuban Air Force, and motor torpedo boats and coastal patrol vessels of the KRONSTADT Class had been delivered to the Cuban Navy.

During the latter part of July and the early part of August, an unusual number of Soviet ships unloaded cargo and passengers at Cuban ports. There were also reports that during the unloading process, all Cubans were excluded from the dock areas and that the stevedoring was accomplished by Soviet personnel accompanying the equipment. By the middle of August, analysis of these reports highlighted the possibility that the Soviet Union was probably introducing surface-to-air missile systems in Cuba, and accordingly special attention was focused on the suspected areas of deployment. As a result of the next high altitude reconnaissance mission, flown on the 29th of August, positive identification was established of SA-2 surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites at two of these suspect locations and at six others also in Western Cuba. A short-range coastal defense cruise missile installation was also subsequently identified.

Up to this time, high altitude reconnaissance missions over Cuba were flown on a regular schedule, weather permitting. These missions were directed to cover the principal airfields, ports, and areas of particular military significance. As a result, we were able to keep close watch on the progress of aircraft deliveries and assembly, airfield improvements, new construction of military installations, development of defensive works around critical areas, delivery and operational readiness of naval units, and the security of the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo.

Each flight after 29 August through 7 October discovered new SAM sites, and three additional cruise missile sites were revealed. Still, there was no evidence indicating the presence of an offensive capability; all these missile systems were defensive in nature.

In addition, Soviet equipment en route to Cuba was kept under visual surveillance during the daylight hours while it was at sea in the vicinity of Cuba and when the ships were in Cuban ports. Through this medium, and through other sources, we were able to keep abreast of the accelerated shipment of arms in Soviet bottoms--but none of this equipment could be identified with offensive missile systems. It now appears, based on what we have subsequently observed, that the offensive missiles and associated equipment were clandestinely loaded and transported to Cuba in holds of large hatch Soviet ships and apparently began arriving in Cuban ports in approximately mid-September. Since all of the strategic missile-associated equipment--such as erectors and transporters--and the missiles themselves were concealed in the holds of the ships and unloaded under the cover of darkness, and under the most stringent Soviet-controlled security restrictions, photographic surveillance at the time was unable to discover the initial introduction of offensive missiles into Cuba.

Firm intelligence on the existence of offensive ballistic missiles was developed in this sequence:

✓ First, from April to late September, a great volume of unconfirmed reports and rumors, principally from refugees and exile organizations, was received concerning the situation in Cuba. Many thousands of refugees were interviewed and several thousand specific written reports were produced, analyzed for intelligence value, and collated with other-source material. Although a large number of these and other reports received in Washington related to the extensive military buildup, none could be equated to strategic weapons when carefully checked out. Actually, interpretation of the high altitude photographs taken before 14 October 1962 of the areas which refugee reports indicated as the most likely locations to contain missiles, either disproved the presence of missiles or linked the suspected activity to SAM or cruise-type missiles that posed no offensive threat to the United States.

The second crucial stage of the story started in late September when a recently arrived Cuban refugee gave the first description of equipment that could be equated with a medium-range ballistic missile. Although raw and unevaluated, this report was an indication of the possible presence in Cuba of offensive ballistic missiles.

The third and final stage in our detection of strategic missiles resulted from careful evaluation of this refugee report--together with other intelligence. In conjunction with a suspicious pattern of deployment of SAM sites noted in the same general area--a pattern which could not be related to any known military installations--analysis of this single report resulted in the designation of a specific area as a suspect medium-range ballistic missile site. Photographic coverage was thereupon proposed, and on the 14th of October a military high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft flew a flight route specifically planned to cover this suspect MRBM area. This led to the discovery of the San Cristobal MRBM complex. The aircraft flew directly over the assigned target area and emerged with hard photographic evidence.

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✓ This mission which verified the existence of MRBMs in Cuba was then followed by a concentrated reconnaissance effort by both high-flying and low-flying reconnaissance aircraft of the Navy and the Air Force.

✓ After this successful flight of the 14th, the next operational task was to obtain aerial photography of the complete island to determine the precise nature of the build-up and the exact configuration of missile sites, their number and location, and the status of their readiness along with other related activity. The program was planned so as to photograph at high altitude all of the known or suspected sites and, at the same time, perform search reconnaissance over the entire island to determine possible additional missile locations, or other significant military activity. When the high-flying aircraft located the objectives, then low-flying aircraft could be dispatched over selected targets to obtain detailed information. With large-scale photography of selected objectives from aircraft flying at altitudes of 500 to 1,000 feet, this information could be readily obtained.

On the day following the President's message, specifically on the 23rd of October, low-altitude flights were initiated. These flights, flown at high speed, were generally over Cuban territory a maximum of from four to seven minutes. The results were of course outstanding, and these missions were continued on a regular basis with both Navy F8U's and Air Force RF-101's participating.

Thus, during the crisis, with the high-altitude aircraft providing reconnaissance of wide areas, and the low flying aircraft providing close-up reconnaissance of selected objectives, the U.S. Intelligence Community was provided with a continuous stream of photography on the basis of which a complete assessment of the situation could be made.

Some comments regarding the present status of Soviet military forces in Cuba, as compared to last July, are appropriate. About 17,000 Soviet military personnel remain in Cuba. Since last July the Soviets have introduced and deployed, in addition to the MRBMs and IL-28 jet light bombers subsequently removed, some 24 surface-to-air (SAM) sites and several coastal defense cruise missile sites. They have also introduced 12 KOMAR-class cruise-missile motor boats, about 40 MIG-21 jet fighters (in addition to more than 60 MIG-15/17/19s previously introduced), substantial numbers of late model tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery weapons, anti-tank missiles, and other battlefield weapons.

At present, the principal elements of the air defense systems, including the SAM sites and the MIG-21 jet fighters are probably controlled and manned by the Soviets. The more modern ground equipment is integral to four highly mobile Soviet ground forces which still remain in Cuba.

We are convinced beyond any reasonable doubt that 42 medium-range ballistic missiles were removed from Cuba aboard eight Soviet ships between 5 and 9 November, and that 42 IL-28 bombers were similarly removed between 5 and 6 December.

All of the IL-28 bombers and thirty-six of the missile/transporters were uncovered for photographic and visual alongside inspection while the Soviet vessels were at sea and the remainder of the missiles were observed covered in exactly the same observable condition as previously noted at the specific missile sites. We are convinced that the Soviets did not have sufficient time between the decision to dismantle and the actual shipment dates to construct dummy missiles and transporters possessing the fine detail and precise measurements of the equipment shipped out. Photographic evidence also is available showing both outloading and outshipping of missile erectors and of fuel and oxidizer trailers. Without this associated equipment, a missile system is inoperative. Since removal of the missiles, our coverage has not revealed the existence of strategic weapons systems in Cuba.